

Carbon-lite collaboration: a virtual visual matrix

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FRONTSHEET

TITLE: CARBON-LITE COLLABORATION: A VIRTUAL VISUAL MATRIX

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ABSTRACT: In this paper we present an example of psychosocial practice – a Visual Matrix – which attempted to address and embody carbon-lite research methods in the face of global heating. Combining virtual and face to face modes of presence and interaction generated insights as well as posing challenges. In the paper we explore two ideas through a discussion of ‘interference’ and ‘inclusion/ exclusion’. The paper extends our understanding of the method to include an awareness of what comes before and after the matrix. By attuning ourselves to its’ materialities and the practices of care involved in staging a matrix and then digesting its affects and effects, we are alerted to the front and the back stage of the method. Following this insight we discuss how a feminist engagement with psychosocial method can be used to connect ‘matters of concern’ such as Global heating with situated practices of care that themselves may constitute a carbon-lite methodology. The paper is polyvocal, generated by participants through virtual communication in the month following the matrix. It documents an intense, rich and finite period of communication and collaboration. It is an example of ‘writing which offers to us a space where we are able to confront reality in such a way that we live more fully’ (Back 2007, p.160). Questions of mortality and finitude are a motif for the matrix, expressed in a range of ways.

KEYWORDS: Visual Matrix; global heating; care; virtual

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The idea: introduction and description

In an attempt to grapple with the unthought known of Global Heating, we committed ourselves to running a Visual Matrix (see below) allowing for virtual involvement. The overall focus of the Visual Matrix was informed by the theme of 'researching with feeling' – and by an invitation for participants (all researchers) to provide in advance an image that linked to a key psychosocial concept, also specified, that they were currently working with. The session itself, in this case lasting about 40 minutes, was staged in three different settings. Two virtual members were present in their own spaces (a private room and a campus office) and virtually present in the shared space, which was a quiet, low-lit space, with chairs arranged in a 'snowflake' pattern in which sight lines among participants are disrupted.

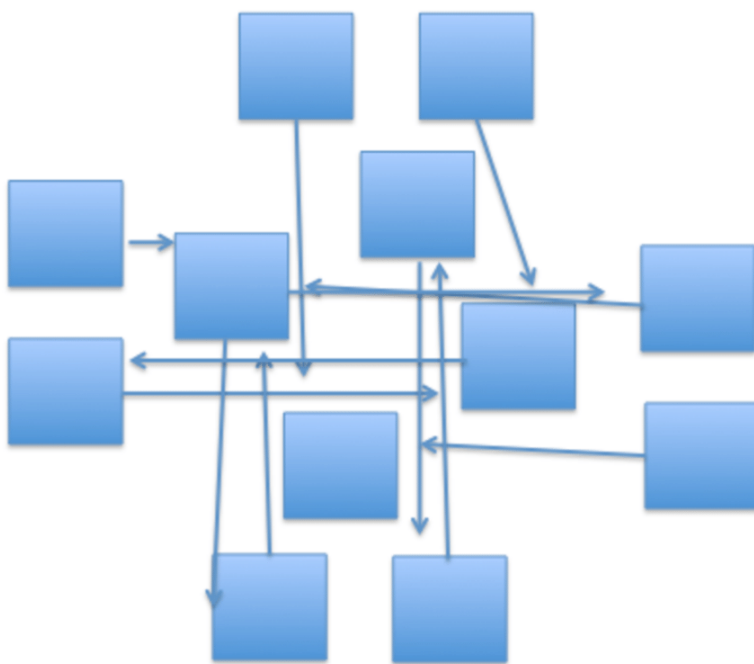


Figure 1. Snowflake seating arrangement

The session's theme is framed in advance and is led in such a way that there is no interpretation and the conductor'sⁱ contributions model the associative reverie-based thinking that goes beyond the individual thinker. After the end of the session and a break,

the eighteen participants reconvened as a (physical and virtual) group, changing register to begin to discuss themes and their meanings derived from the matrix dataⁱⁱ.

The matrix was introduced and led by Wendy Hollway who first explained the rationale for the setting, the seating arrangement, the emphasis on images and associations rather than the usual academic workshop modes of thinking and her role in participating and modelling a process of reverie.

Process

The two virtual members (Lois Tonkin in New Zealand and Jette Kofoed in Denmark) joined the introduction and were welcomed to the day, participating in the Visual Matrix session via Skype through laptops placed on two chairs within the wider circle. In this way their presence had a physical representation which, by virtue of the chairs, echoed the relation to others of those in situ. Care was taken to ensure a connection in advance and to ensure that virtual participants could hear what was said in the group. When the virtual participants first came on line, before most participants arrived, their prior collegiate relationships and friendships with some of the organisers were reanimated with greetings and brief exchange of news. The idea of carbon-lite collaboration was introduced to all participants as a frame for the day.

The Visual Matrix, set up in a different room from the previous introduction, began after a short break. In-situ participants arrived to find approximately twenty images (one each provided by participants) displayed along one of the walls. They were given ten minutes for the quiet contemplation of these before the start of the matrix. Virtual participants were provided advance access to the same set of imagesⁱⁱⁱ Skype connections were re-established and virtual participants were given a place each within the snowflake seating arrangement, each supported by a dedicated member of the group, who could enable, if asked, the room and participants to be seen by turning the laptop. (In Lois's case, this did not happen and her vision was restricted throughout.) The matrix exercise then took place with both in-situ and virtual members contributing. Several times in-situ members were asked to speak up so that one of the virtual members (Jette) could hear. In practice, the New Zealand connection was highly audible and the Danish one more problematic, especially with regard to hearing

each other. Sometimes, for in-situ participants, electrical feedback and ambient sounds from the settings in which virtual participants were situated complicated the relationship between 'here' and 'there' – however despite such 'interference' the matrix exercised flowed and carried on generatively for the allocated 40 minutes.

The VM principles: reverie, containment and the snowflake seating arrangement

The Visual Matrix is a development of the Social Dreaming Matrix (Manley 2019), a method of, collectively, bringing to the surface 'hard-to-think' ideas. These methods share two innovative characteristics, which together make them psychosocial. First, the matrix harvests not individual or personal meaning but ideas of shared collective significance. Second, the methods use dreaming and reverie to produce content that normally resides outside conscious awareness: both ask for dreams, associations (spontaneous emergent thoughts) and images. Dreams are well known for expressing unconscious, repressed, material but, unlike in this method, psychoanalysis habitually traced their significance to early familial experience and thence to individual biography. Whereas the Social Dreaming Matrix draws initially on sleeping dreams, the Visual Matrix dispenses with the design that, within the frame of the event, requires a prior night's dream material and provides or elicits visual images designed to stimulate associations, ideas and further images relevant to the chosen theme (dreams are also welcome). The two methods share an emphasis on the creation of a reverie-based space (see below) where participants can drop their purposive thinking and open themselves to free association. When these associative thoughts are spoken into the Matrix, they cease to 'belong' to any individual; rather they become part of a mesh whose content can later be analysed for its significance in referring to aspects of the contemporary world that reside in the 'unthought known' and are difficult to access within dominant discourses. This mesh draws on Deleuzian terms of affect, which, in this context, conceptualizes the extension of affective resonances into a space beyond physical boundaries and thus, also, to the virtual participants.

At first glance, virtual participation in a research gathering organized to provide an experience of associative and affect-based discovery of the unthought known looked unpromising. The set up pays careful attention to the physical conditions in the room precisely because they are so important for obtaining a shared reverie-based mode of

knowing that privileges imagination and association over cognition. As this method is often used for researching hard-to-think (because painful) topics, it is important that the physical set up, quiet and low-lit, provides containment (in the sense of safe support for thinking previously unprocessed thoughts). Although it seems likely that physical absence is always going to be an undercurrent, could these principles be extended to virtual participants and if so, how? In the following we allow the two virtual voices to speak.

Jette:

In an unexpected way the VM provided a perfect setup for virtual participation because the snowflake formation discourages eye contact. So my participation in the room via a lap top on a chair underpinned the idea embedded in the VM of encouraging not looking at each other, and the snowflake formation made it accessible for me to take part on almost equal terms. So somehow my virtual participation in the VM session was a successful experience. My willingness to take active part was no doubt dependent on the careful caregiving and the fact that I had been part of preparing the session with Wendy. It also depended on the fact that I knew several people. I don't think that it would have been possible without the care and the 'knowing you'.

I am sure that the careful and diligent preparation paved the way for this experience. I suppose it would not be possible to just enter the room with no prior knowledge and participate in a meaningful way. It took caring to allow this to unfold.

However, the consistency of privileging non-visual experience needed to be refined:

I was appointed a 'caregiver' who took very good care of me. I had asked for her to turn the laptop screen so that I could see who was speaking. It was very kind of her but I suppose it must have disturbed her participation in the Visual Matrix session thoroughly and somehow mine as well. Or I had mixed feelings about it. It was not possible fully to enter into the reverie that Wendy encouraged. On one hand, my caregiver showing me who talked was in many ways helpful because it allowed me to feel some kind of presence in the room. On the other, the reverie was also disturbed by the very same.

Jette concluded: 'So the technology is by no means innocent in what it affords.'

This virtual experience suggests that in future we would be more strictly consistent with the principle of obstructing sight lines to encourage reverie by leaving the laptops stationary and facing forward throughout the Visual Matrix to allow both the in situ and virtual members to enter into the reverie. Impeding these sight lines borrows a principle from the classic psychoanalytic couch where the patient's free association is aided by speaking into a space. While vision is the crucial sense for experiencing the displayed images, once the Visual Matrix, with its emphasis on reverie, begins, sound is a more important sensory medium than vision, a principle materialized in the discouraging of looking in favour of voice. In the introductory framing of the session by Wendy, this was emphasized, with a view to equalizing the position of virtual with in-situ participants. She said that if participants wanted to close their eyes for the entire 40 minutes, that would be fine, potentially quite helpful.

Co-presence

What is it that enables someone geographically far away to feel connected to the in-situ event? And what is it that enables in situ participants to extend the experience of physical connection in the matrix to virtual participants? The conceptual theme of this psycho-social research workshop was 'researching with feeling', so 'affect' is a key conceptual resource. It is understood to be able to 'travel' through data analytic groups (Thomson et al 2011) and, in the Deleuzian affect theory tradition which provides a strong theoretical underpinning for Social Dreaming and Visual Matrix methodologies (Manley 2019; Manley and Hollway 2019; Manley, J. and Roy, A. 2017; Froggett, L., Manley, J. and Roy, A. 2015), affect is understood to enable infinite web-like connections among people and among people and objects.

Lois's account of her experience, so far away in space and time (it was, for her, the middle of the night by the time we finished), specifies what helped to create co-presence for her.

Lois: I want to make special mention of the sense of co-presence because it was such a strong feature of the experience for me. I find it impossible (and unnecessary?) to untangle my personal response to my sense of presence with Rachel and Wendy in

particular, because I was so delighted to see them, and I was surprised by how 'real' I experienced that connection to be. For me, there was also a very strong connection with aspects of myself (as a researcher academic, working in this field and all that entails, and all of which was abruptly severed at the end of January when I was diagnosed and immediately stopped work). Experiencing that part of 'me' again was intensely moving for me, and the experience triggered a powerful dream afterwards when I finished the meeting at 1.00 am. Clearly this personal response is beyond the scope of this discussion, but its powerful impression on me does speak to the effectiveness — rather than inadequacy— of the 'carbon lite' connection.

I felt the same connection with Gillian and Louise as with Rachel and Wendy, both of whom I had met before. Having said that, that connection felt strong because I have previously made a face-to-face embodied connection with those women in the past, and I was building on that. I did not feel as strong a sense connection with others who are strangers to me, but no less so than meeting them for the first time in a face- to- face setting. For me this co-presence is a dimension of the experience that is positive rather than a kind of unfortunate second best, and it would have been further enhanced if the laptop with my image on it were somehow able to be moved around so that I could see as well as hear the speakers.

'Connecting' with the images themselves was much less effective. As you note, I had already seen the images as one of the organisers, but I felt very disadvantaged in not being able to see them as participants discussed them. This is an organisational matter that would be easily addressed however; if I had printed the images out and participants referred to them by number for example, or even if I had toggled between a file of them on my computer as people spoke it would have helped a lot.

It seems we have two versions of co-presence here: interpersonal relationships (strongest with a deep history) and relationships to the images. The difference between Lois and Jette's connection to the images was striking, easily accountable by the fact that Jette (being in her university office) could print them all out and had them arranged at a large table while Lois had not been able to do so. As she comments, this is easily rectifiable: the

principle is that affect travels between participants and images in and through technology as part of what we might call an affective interface (but for Lois “affective interface” feels too chilly and distanced to describe the connection I felt’). Whatever we choose to call it, it seems to rely on the dynamics of co-presence combined with the actual technology of the screens, and the images to animate the shared affects in the reverie-based climate of the matrix.

After a break the group reconvened in a horse shoe formation, including the two virtual members with a seat each, and a debrief discussion took place, starting with a focus on the method. In support of the reasoning above as to how the virtual participation worked in the reverie-based matrix, Jette did not think that the affective involvement extended well to the post-matrix session:

Jette: The Visual Matrix worked much better for virtual participation than the horse shoe formation. I suppose it has to do with the fact that then eye contact and ‘traditional’ participation was encouraged and hence the privilege of the Visual Matrix was gone. Somehow my participation became less relevant in the mapping exercise, or reduced to knowing how the ‘virtual’ was working, as I was one of the virtual participants. In the future I would say that the laptop way of participation was surprisingly successful and that videoconferencing would need to be the technological solution for the post Visual Matrix session. And with as much care as was part of the Visual Matrix preparations.

All participants, in-situ and virtual, were asked to comment on how the previous matrix session had worked for them. Some ‘annoyances’ were shared including the problem of noise feedback and the ambiguity of the spaces where virtual members were situated. Yet, remarkably, the consensus was that the matrix succeeded in operating powerfully on participants; that the virtual members felt themselves part of a shared process (‘It felt successful in creating a reverie-based way of knowing for me’ – Lois; ‘So somehow my virtual participation in the Visual Matrix session was a successful experience’ – Jette and that in-situ members felt that virtual participants’ contributions connected in a relevant way and influenced the patterns that were building in a similar way to the others.

It seems likely that there would be a numerical element operating, something that future research might take up as a focus for enquiry.

Lois. Would the connection have felt as strong if half the participants were elsewhere, and half in the room, for example? It did feel as if the embodied participants in the room 'held' that as a space of co-presence, and it would be interesting to see how/if that changes when many more of us were to be virtually present.

The annoyances for the in situ members took their own form. For example Gillian Ruch expressed frustration that the two aims of the Visual Matrix got confused in the post matrix conversation which began by thinking about the carbon lite/virtual aspects of it before engaging with the unthought knowns that emerged in the context of the Matrix's engagement with the conceptual images. She writes 'For me the impact and quality of these conversations would have been enhanced if the substantive matrix conversation had come first (exploring people's experiences of psychosocial methodologies and the concepts they have been working with that relate to psychosocial research) and the carbon lite virtual aspects of the process second, as this was an additional experiment that was over and above the usual matrix method (albeit for Wendy her research image /concept straddled both domains)'.

Exclusions

Many researchers are concerned about how to participate in transnational groupings while avoiding a carbon footprint. It is commonly acknowledged that although video participation works reasonably well for informational purposes, it is hard to enter a free-flowing discussion virtually, that one easily feels excluded if the number of participants are unequally distributed on sites, and that it is easier to feel engaged if one has physically met the other participants on a previous occasion.

Jette: Somehow virtual participation encourages potential exclusion. I am cut off from bodily, spatial and even temporal embeddedness. Hence, if I want to

participate, and not to witness the conversations, I need to work hard and I need the large group to need and want my participation. So somehow such a setup touches upon very basic emotions and experiences of belonging or not. I depended on those I knew. It felt too difficult to figure out who the others were including their engagements are with the field. Gillian's introductory session helped though. It seems that a carbon lite Visual Matrix has the potential for investigating belonging and processes of inclusion and exclusion as an experimental lab. It *is* a lab of processes of inclusion and exclusion and takes an effort to be physically excluded and to insist on not *feeling* excluded.

I suppose this also has to do with fact that my body was not just not present in Sussex, but present in a context of my office at campus in Denmark. This is why, at the end of the session, I showed my space, moving my laptop around, to the whole group. Wendy named this an 'intervention'. I did not think of it as an intervention at the time, but perhaps this is an appropriate term for what I did, which was to find a way of making the physicality of my set up present.

In response to Jette's experience, Lois comments on how different the conditions were of her participation and how particular the effects can be:

Lois: This is very interesting. As you may remember, my participation in this event came at the end of a day of physical crisis for me, and my participation or not was unsure right up until the moment it began, late in my evening. I was by no means in the personal shape that Jette was in, of being calmly in my office participating in a different way and being able to reflect on that in a measured kind of way! In considering my participation these are dimensions that have to be accounted for.

Lois extends the implications of Jette's ideas of exclusion and inclusion and of her 'intervention' in introducing participants to her office via her laptop:

I think Jette's comments above are very pertinent. They raise for me the idea that it's easy to think of a conventional way of meeting as the default, preferred way of

working in which operating 'carbon lite' is an attempt to ameliorate potential difficulties. But what if we turned that around, and think about how in some ways a disembodied connection might enhance a reverie-based shared reflection? What if the 'embodied' participants are seen as equally (though perhaps differently) needing to shift their own familiar and preferred ways of connecting with others (the inclusion/exclusion that Jette speaks of) and be conscious of the ways in which they are required perhaps to be active in making connections with others both embodied and virtual in practical senses (moving computers about and so forth), and at the same time suspending their tendency to be active in trying to 'make up for' the perceived inadequacies of the form of interaction and rather be active in opening up to what it affords? What kinds of action might that require of all participants? In what ways might the conceptualisation below inform that connection making?

Conceptualisation

What enabled the embracing feeling of the matrix to encompass the in-situ participants and the virtual two? The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion would have construed the matrix contributions as 'thoughts without a thinker'; unprocessed emotional experiences that are able, through the containment and impersonality of the matrix, to be brought to thought collectively. The radical *psychosocial* quality of the Visual Matrix and Social Dreaming methods is that they produce a sort of "collage" in which contributions do not belong to the individuals who make them, and where the collage-making has been jointly experienced, perhaps recorded in notes or in audio form. Their participation is conceptualized as providing vehicles for thoughts without a thinker, enabling them to become collectively thought. In principle, therefore, feelings of exclusion and inclusion are irrelevant in the sense that they (do not) belong to individuals, to egos. In practice they are likely to be highly relevant though, especially in the cases where reverie is harder to establish. We did not extend our careful setting (low light, quiet, impersonality) to virtual participants, but in principle it would be equally necessary.

Julian Manley's innovative work on Social Dreaming (the precursor and close relative of the Visual Matrix) uses Deleuzian affect theory to theorise the production of shared affect through dreaming/reverie, imagining and association in the setting of the matrix (Manley

2019). In social dreaming 'the visual images ... are not representative of things ... but rather affects in visual attire', a 'giving of form to affect'. Manley calls these 'image-affects' (Manley 2019 p.47). These insights can be extended to the Visual Matrix. As the matrix proceeds, the complexity of image-affects multiplies and fluctuates in intensity. 'It is the containing aspect of the matrix that enables this complexity to be held in the minds of the participants' (op cit p.48). There was some evidence of the matrix's increasing capacity to manage the complexity and considerable uncertainty. One example was some early speculation on why there were three versions of the same image (and only one of all the others) a question which was not solved but fizzled out to make way for more associative connections. Another was the difficulty of engaging with images which were not easy to label. How to talk about something that seemed to elude words? One image of this type did not crop up at all in the forty minutes. However, in other language-elusive images, participants increasingly were able to talk about their affective relation to the images in place of the more cognitive task of naming them.

The pattern of the matrix resembled a free flow, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as directions of motion ... defined by a circulation of states. Non-sequential, infinite and non-autocentric' (cited by Manley p.92). It is a form of associative thinking that leads Long and Manley (2019) to coin the term "associative unconscious", equivalent to thinking in affects, which are trans-subjective. Through voice it seems that this thinking in affects can transmit not only within the room but virtually. Tellingly perhaps, Deleuze uses the word "virtual" as in the following from Manley (p104) 'the images, image-affects and associations that cross and meet and depart once more, creating virtual possibilities that have never been thought before ... such is the unthought known of the matrix ... the intensity of affect brings them to life ... and this is what allows the "knowns" to become "thought" ... further strata of our shared world are discovered'. The virtual, hence, does not only refer to the members not physically present in Sussex, but in the Deleuzian sense means the not-yet-actualised referring to how multiple affects travelled through the space(s) of the virtual Visual Matrix.

Concerns, cares and mattering

In 2004 Bruno Latour made an intervention into public discussion of the growing danger of conspiracy theories and 'fake news' – suggesting that the project of deconstruction had

been misconstrued as the mistrust of facts (and expert opinion) rather than a willingness to accept uncertainty, reinvigorating rather than abandoning the interrogation of the material world. He argues that 'The question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism. What I am going to argue is that the critical mind, if it is to renew itself and be relevant again, is to be found in the cultivation of a stubbornly realist attitude—to speak like William James—but a realism dealing with what I will call matters of concern, not matters of fact.' (2004: 231) For Latour climate change or global heating is such a 'matter of concern' which can be further conceptualised as a 'gathering' of ideas, forces, players and arenas in which 'things' and issues, not facts, come to be and to persist, because they are supported, cared for, worried over. From a feminist perspective Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) welcomes Latour's argument but warns us against becoming preoccupied only with matters of concern. She encourages us to bring in the quality of 'care', not to replace 'concern', but to allow for "the stronger affective and ethical connotation" of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 42) . Bellacasa invites us to dig more deeply into the empirical investigation of care, as a matter of 'caring' (as a verb). Such *doing* of care "materializes it as an ethically and politically charged practice" (op cit) in asking who cares, for what, when and how.

Global heating is a matter of concern that is hard to think about. Its global and intergenerational scales overwhelm us. We hoped that by integrating virtual participation into the Visual Matrix method we would facilitate engagement with the 'unthought known' that is global heating. But what if we follow Bellacasa's advice and look more closely at our practices of caring and ask empirical questions about the who, what, why and where of care – and then try to scaffold between these situated practices to the matter of concern that is global heating? How might psychosocial methods help us travel between these scales?

A key contribution of feminist scholarship on care is to make visible what is usually invisible. This means the thinking, planning and holding of mess and complexity that underpins the creation of anything. The material forms of care for the Visual Matrix were shared, unevenly between participants. Gillian for example, took responsibility for the lunch and for setting a tone at the beginning of the day that was quiet, respectful and very different from the usual environment of the work place. She expressed her intentions as follows:

Gillian: Attending to the immediate environment of an event, such as this one, is, to my mind, an important signifier to participants that care is being exercised in relation to the group and that psychosocial work requires thoughtful attention in all respects. Starting the day with a carefully arranged circle of chairs in a room devoid of clutter and mess is all part of that process of care. In the centre of the circle was a vase of informally arranged garden flowers, a singing bowl and a Kitbag. The Kitbag^{iv} is a resource designed to promote emotional literacy and as an introductory exercise the Kitbag feelings card was circulated around the group with each person introducing themselves, selecting a colour to describe their emotional state and saying as much, or as little, as they wished to accompany their colour choice. A Kitbag presence card was then selected which invited the group to spend a minute in silence reflecting on the instruction: *Sit in stillness. This moment has everything you need.* A ring on the singing bowl accompanied the beginning of the minute's silence. Having used this approach in other contexts I was mindful of the capacity of the shared silence to forge powerful bonds between individuals and to focus our collective attention on our shared endeavor.

Louise Sims took responsibility for something she found more complex and demanding than she characterises as the 'logistical preparations'.

Louise: I was leading the logistical preparation for the Visual Matrix. I worked closely with our two 'distant' participants Jette and Lois in the days leading up to the Visual Matrix. I sourced two laptops and held a Skype meeting with Jette to test the sound quality and the acoustics in the room. I was also encouraged to think about 'practices of care' and to develop an attunement to Jette and Lois as 'distant' participants. What emerged for me during the lead up, the day and then the following day was a feeling of immersion; probably also because I had collected and curated the images from all the participants. So I had been thinking about connections/concepts/imagery before the Visual Matrix and also kind of 'coaching' participants to attend. I also had some other responsibilities in relation to the running of the day. My head felt full leading up to and during the day. On the walk home from Lewes (after our post-event meal) I could hardly pick my feet up. My whole body was full. I arrived home, sat on the sofa and the babysitter told me about her

bad day at work where she had listened to a young person overdose on the phone. I felt wedded to my seat and I could not get out of the chair.

Another invisibility that was part of the matrix was the perilous state of Lois's health. The original workshop had been organised to coincide with a visit that she was to make to the UK. The idea was to combine a 'masterclass' in psychosocial method with a showcasing of doctoral work at Sussex University using psychosocial methods. In February 2019 Lois contacted us with what she termed the 'difficult news' that she was terminally ill and would not be coming to England. A decision was made to go ahead with the workshop - a positive act of hope in the face of sadness – and Wendy who had worked closely with Lois in the past agreed to lead a Visual Matrix. It was only as a result of Jette and Wendy's previous suggestion that we explore virtual participation that the possibility evolved that Lois might join in. Her inclusion in group emails meant that she was able to opt in, without any assumptions or expectations on our part about what this would be. In fact, our assumption was that Lois would not be taking part and we debated how we would introduce the event. Would we explain to participants how the symposium had evolved? It was something of a surprise, a wonderful surprise, when we discovered that Lois was hoping to take part given our offer of virtual inclusion. We then had to think carefully about how we introduced the event and took care of the people in the room and the people at a distance, who came together with different and partial knowledges about each others' circumstances. We agreed that we would treat Lois in the same way as other participants.

In writing this paper we have found it necessary to make this exclusion explicit and to integrate this knowledge and associated experience into the record, allowing connection to be made between individual and collective mortality in the context of Global Heating. In that sense the matrix continues into this collective writing project. There was something risky taking place during the matrix. Boundaries were being unsettled in unfamiliar ways, resulting in dynamic and fluid feelings of inclusion and exclusion for [those involved. The day after the matrix, Rachel Thomson, Wendy and Louise received a powerful communication from Lois who reported a sensation of transcendence following the event, allowing her to reconnect with aspects of herself that had become lost in the gruelling treatment for cancer.

I've woken to brilliant sunshine and feeling happier than I have since January, when I was diagnosed. After our meeting I went immediately to bed and slept very deeply all night. I had a strange and very vivid dream which I won't recount in detail, but which entailed an object that had been precious to me having been inexplicably broken. I was saddened and mystified by the breakage, but strangely it didn't feel irrevocably broken; as if something could be salvaged from it. On waking I had the strongest feeling of happiness in having had that time with you all last night. The best part of the academic life for me was meeting what felt like 'my tribe' in the psychosocial community, and especially of course, doing so in England, because I love England and also because I felt so isolated as a psychosocial researcher in New Zealand. Being party of that community and participating in it last night was just wonderful. I recognised a part of me that I haven't seen—that has been replaced by this weird sick person whose life is **completely** different and so often tangled with unpleasant and difficult things—for four months. It was like finding an important and treasured part of myself again. I'm so grateful. Certainly bittersweet; I'm very tearful this morning, but lots of sweetness in with the tinge of bitterness there. Last night's meeting came, as you may have realised, after something of a crisis of eighteen or so hours of intense pain which was very much like childbirth without the happy event of a baby at the end! The settling of the pain and making the meeting was a wonderful contrast for me! So thank you all, so much.

During the method some of us had been aware that we might be talking to Lois for the last time, and that this intensely intimate encounter was happening in a public that was constituted in a very uneven way. Immediately after the event the authors started the process of documenting and reflecting on the matrix, a core group sharing reflections and insights. Sometimes these writings were shared in pairs as people tested out whether what they had written could be made public. For example the piece written by Louise above was first shared with Rachel and subsequently with Lois as a way of asking for her consent to be open about her illness as one of the unthought (or unspoken) knowns circulating in the matrix. Louise, in many ways, held and orchestrated the backstage of the matrix. For her

this complicated what was possible on the front stage and explains some of the exhaustion she felt after the event.

Louise: The notion of 'interference' resonates powerfully for me. I experienced 'interference' in the matrix through a tension arising from my role and my knowledge – something about care and the unspeakable. Our colleague has cancer and is dying. She wanted to participate and we wanted her to participate. She had contacted me on the night before the Visual Matrix to say she would be unable to take part due to her pain. Just as we were about to start and as I was talking to Jette on Skype, Lois called to say she could contribute. We quickly set up the laptop and I assigned myself to take care of her through the Visual Matrix. I found that my role and my responsibility towards Lois preoccupied me during the Visual Matrix. But perhaps more fundamentally if the Visual Matrix process is designed to access below the surface knowledge and Wendy's concept had directed us towards the unspeakable related to the end of the world (my reading) then I was working very hard not to lose myself in a reverie where I might name the unspeakable – Lois's dying and the end of her world. In that sense I could not (because of 'practices of care' or something) take full part. I wondered too if others with that knowledge (not least Lois) were engaged with a similar tension. Is this something we can think about given the powerful overlaps with the focus of the matrix? Or does it remain unspeakable? What are we engaged in here if we cannot speak of dying? What would happen if we did? Those were the questions that created the 'interference' for me in the Visual Matrix process. I was in my head trying not to let my feelings flow.

Lois's reply reveals another dimension of what mattered in the matrix: she writes to Louise: 'Oh the unspoken drifts are so deep on this one! First of all, given all that you write of your days and evenings around that symposium, *thank you* for attending so carefully to me in that session. I felt your kindness, warmth, and attention very strongly and, given the 24 hours I had just had, experienced that in a very unfiltered way that was much more powerful than just one of a colleague being kind to me. I'm sorry it meant you were less able to participate, but given that you had a dual role in some ways (participating and caring for me), perhaps that was inevitable... Thank you for writing it as a free association piece and sharing that with me too. I'm happy for you to share it with others. The whole situation—

me on, then off, then on again at the last minute, issues (literally!) of life and death and so forth—perhaps might be thought of as exceptional; not the usual sets of issues that one might expect to be dealing with in a day-long session at PLACE University. One might easily assume that those kinds of issues are not usually sitting in the room to be addressed in some way (including not overtly addressing them). But in my experience of working with groups as an educator in the field of loss and grief for thirty years, knowing that **very** often participants are confronting things like [this], and my awareness of the unspoken grief around climate crisis that was one of the threads in the day...perhaps such issues being there, unspoken, unspeakable, might rather be presumed? Hence the very deep affective drifts. ...[There are] A whole bunch of inarticulable things about our relationship as people with 'the natural world (as if we in some way are **not** the natural world), and for me now of course, a particular resonance with the natural processes of decay and death and what remains/lives on. It's a big project and I won't get it all done but it makes me SO HAPPY exploring it'.

This private voice to Louise is not the same voice as Lois uses in her contributions above, but in her final communication to the bigger group on 28 June she hinted that she wished to make the more personal narrative more public. Lois writes to the group: 'I'm not sure that I can add anything further to this piece, but I'm interested in the possibilities that Louise's thoughts might come to, because they **may** offer me something in terms of a more personal response'.

Lois died before we were able to take this further but in writing this section of the paper we have tried to honour the spirit of what was communicated between us.

The first draft of this paper is composed of writing and communication between a small group of Visual Matrix participants. It was written and edited in the light of Lois's death and a first draft of the paper was subsequently shared with the full group of participants as a way of sharing the bigger picture of what was happening in the group but also as a way of inviting further contributions and reflections. These were not forthcoming although expressions of surprise and sympathy were conveyed. Perhaps this silence points to forms of inclusion and exclusion that we are yet to name and articulate. We offer this intimate

material as testimony of how and why an empirical engagement with matters of care might be important – the back-stage work that goes into the production of public knowledge. In asking questions about who was caring, for whom, when, where and why we do not simply break boundaries (though this is clearly in play) we use a feminist relational theory in order to generate something that did not exist and in doing so face our modest place as fragile, time limited carbon-based life forms struggling with terrifying matters of concern such as death and global heating. Engaging with matter involves making claims about *what matters*, questions of value, ethics and politics. Writing this piece together, using virtual methods of communication, is a way of sharing our experience of what happened but also of what is possible (necessary). Our decision to experiment in this way was inspired by a Danish academic community's commitment to enact a low-carbon academia^v. There is significant care and labour involved in committing to developing ways of making low-carbon academia work. The particularities of the practices of carbon-lite care that this virtual Visual Matrix method demand: choosing, sharing, absorbing, connecting, documenting, digesting, reflecting, representing, editing, negotiating, liking and not-liking, finishing, publishing. The Visual Matrix method has the potential to be adapted as a carbon-lite mode of working, but that does not mean that it is easy, nor that it produces easily absorbed knowledge. But it does effect and affect us.

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ⁱ “Conductor” was the preferred term in the original Social Dreaming Matrix; “facilitator” would be a good enough fit also.

ⁱⁱ In addition to the six authors, matrix participants included Matt Ellis, Perpetua Kirby, Rachel Larkin, Amy Lynch, Michelle Lefevre, Barry Luckock, Rachael Owens, Susie Pearce, Alberto Poletti, Peter Redman, Paul Shuttleworth and Rebecca Webb. Material was also contributed by Roma Thomas and Loreto Rodriguez. We are grateful to all participants for the collective thinking made possible by their contributions in advance of and during the group.

ⁱⁱⁱ This only worked, technically, in one case and in retrospect was an important provision, in particular to have printed copies so that these could be seen when referred to – as they were much of the time - in the matrix

^{iv} <http://www.iffpraxis.com/kitbag>

^v The paper was written before the Covid 19 crisis and lockdown that saw many of us move much of our communication online. We finalise the paper in what seems a new world, where group co-presence becomes a fond memory and where we have rapidly adapted to the losses and gains of being together apart. In this new context the paper may be read as an assertion of how we might experiment with blending face to face and virtual connection, thinking through its effects and affects, choosing rather than accepting a new platform and its affordances as a *fait accompli*.